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emerging trends

The Princeton Religion Research Center

Summer 1992

How It All Began

George H. Gallup, Jr. recalls a meeting of the minds in 1977 leading to the formation of the Princeton Religion Research Center

When I first met Sister Miriam Murphy I was already predisposed in her favor. I have always been in considerable awe of a person able to make a total commitment of life in a religious order.

I was fascinated to discover in that first meeting that we were on the same wavelength in our assessment of the religious mood of the nation.

She articulated what Gallup Poll figures seemed to be saying about the spiritual climate of the nation: that many Americans were earnestly groping for spiritual growth.

Many Americans reported they had had profound religious experiences, but could not always find the spiritual food they needed in organized religion. A survey conducted at that time for a group of thirty-one religious denominations (convened by the National Council of Churches of Christ) showed that large percentages of Americans, both inside and outside organized religion, accused churches of losing their "spiritual character."

The results of this survey suggested to me that churches may have been ill-prepared to deal with spiritual experiences. What appeared to be called for was a "spiritual ministry" to ensure that the church would communicate with people who are all charged up about their faith, but who feel spiritually homeless.

So I was pleased to find that while Sister Miriam was obviously a very spiritual person, she was also a pragmatist. She immediately saw an important contribution that scientific surveys of public opinion could make to an understanding of the religious climate of the nation. In this respect she was ahead of many religious leaders at that time who had been slow to come to the view that surveys, if properly conducted, can provide valuable indicators for understanding the spiritual climate of our time.

Our commonality of interests soon led to the formation of the Princeton Religion Research Center.

Its purpose was to gain a better understanding of the nature and depth of religious commit-ment in the United States and abroad, and to explore ways this information could enable leaders to promote spiritual growth.

I also discovered in that first meeting — and again it was a happy discovery — that while Sister Miriam as a sociologist was sharply critical of the extravagances and pretensions of certain religious movements, she did not let her feelings keep her from recognizing the good and positive elements of these movements. In fact, she was eager to identify and strengthen the commonalities among the various faiths and denominations, because she approached religion not just as a code, creed, or form of worship, but as a spiritual way of life in the kingdom where the centrality of God's love bonds us.

One of PRRC's first publications was Sister Miriam's *Prayer in Action* (Abingdon Press, 1979). In it she reminded us that social affairs and committee meetings may have little to do with true religion — that what is really needed is not *communication* among people, but *communion* — communion rooted in love of God

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How It All Began ...

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At a time when the "me generation" flourished, she warned us not to be caught up in pseudo-religious movements where the central focus is not God, but a contemporary human being of one's self. The touchstone, she said, is not "how great I am" but "how great thou art."

It can still be said of the American people that they are in a period of spiritual adolescence, eagerly and impulsively groping for the means by which to mature in their faith.

Miriam Murphy, S.N.D., Ph.D.

Doctor Murphy's scholarship exemplified the need to search for the basic elements of various religious faiths and movements in this country, to which she brought a broad range of academic and personal experiences. She encouraged us to take very seriously the biblical injunction, "We need to test everything; hold fast to what is good." *(I. Thessalonians 5:21)*

Sister Murphy is Senior Research Associate of the Princeton Religion Research Center.

Currently Available Resources

PRINCETON RELIGION RESEARCH CENTER publications are available by sending your check or money order to Princeton Religion Research Center, P.O. Box 389, Princeton, NJ 08542.

THE ROLE OF THE BIBLE IN AMERICAN SOCIETY – A compilation of survey findings on readership and knowledge of the Bible by George H. Gallup, Jr. and Robert Bezilla. $9.95.

THE UNCHURCHED AMERICAN – TEN YEARS LATER – Essential survey data on how to reach the unchurched and also how to keep present members in the fold. $29.00.

100 QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS – A 252-page book by George H. Gallup, Jr. and Sarah Jones that answers the 100 most frequently asked questions about religion. The cost is $30 or only $9.95 when combined with an order for any other PRRC publication.

THE GALLUP RELIGION POLL – A nationally syndicated weekly newspaper column by George H. Gallup, Jr. and Robert Bezilla. If unavailable in your area, one-year subscriptions to the releases are available from PRRC at $95 for a one-year subscription.

RELIGION IN AMERICA – The current issue is $30. Copies of the 1990 and 1987 issues of the series are available at $10 each.

OTHER BOOKS BY PRINCETON RELIGION RESEARCH CENTER authors that can be ordered through your local book dealer or directly from the publisher.

VARIETIES OF PRAYER – by George H. Gallup, Jr. and Margaret M. Poloma. Trinity Press International. A sociological analysis of Americans at prayer. 1-800-421-8874.

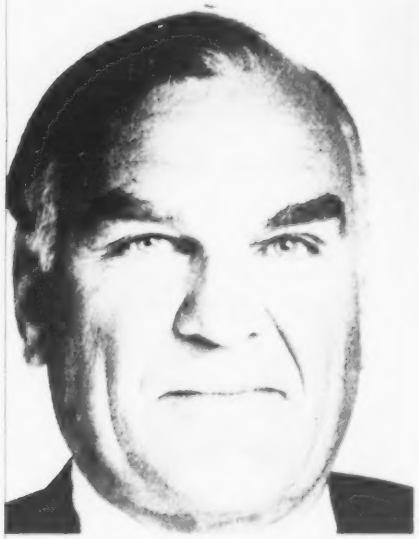
THE SAINTS AMONG US – by George H. Gallup, Jr. and Timothy Jones. How the spiritually committed are changing our world. Morehouse Publishing. 1-800-877-0012.

THE PEOPLE'S RELIGION – by George H. Gallup, Jr. and Jim Castelli. Encompasses the attitudes and trends of many different religious backgrounds. MacMillan Publishing Company. 1-800-257-5755.

Emerging Trends in its Fourteenth Year of Publication

Emerging Trends is now in its 14th year of publication. "Volume 1 No. 1" was published in January 1979 as the newsletter of the Princeton Religion Research Center.

The Center is an inter-faith non-denominational research organizations with headquarters in Princeton, New Jersey, founded in 1977 by George H. Gallup, Jr. and Sr. Miriam Murphy. Its nature is to gain a better understanding of the nature and depth of religious commitment in the United States and abroad.



George H. Gallup, Jr.

George H. Gallup, Jr. is the founder and Executive Director of PRRC. He is Chairman of the George H. Gallup International Institute and is Co-Chairman of the Gallup Organization.

He majored in religion at Princeton University and throughout his career in public opinion research has sought to measure the spiritual dimension of life in the United States and in the world.

In addition to his many lectures, books and reports on religion, he is active in the Episcopal church both on the national level and as a member of the vestry of All Saints' Episcopal Church in Princeton.

Alison Gallup

Alison Gallup is the heart and voice of PRRC. Representing the third generation of the Gallup family active in public opinion research, she acts as both administrator of the PRRC office and as Managing Editor of its publications, including *Emerging Trends*.

Since joining PRRC in 1988, Ali has played an increasingly important role in its affairs. It is her voice you are likely to hear when seeking information about PRRC findings or to order our publications. Behind the scenes she manages circulation and fulfillment archives for *Emerging Trends* and other publications. She maintains PRRC's growing archives and data banks of survey data on religion. She also is the principal proofreader and accuracy checker for the publications and coordinates their printing.

Robert Bezilla

Robert Bezilla is Editor of *Emerging Trends* and other PRRC publications, including the recently published *Religion In America 1992*.

In addition to his duties at PRRC, he directs the Gallup Youth Survey, and co-authors the nationally syndicated Gallup Religion Poll with George H. Gallup, Jr. He also is now conducting an important study on teen-age tobacco use for the Gallup Institute. Active in survey research for over 25 years, he is a former officer of the Gallup Organization and was President of Benson & Benson, Inc. He is a member of the Nassau Presbyterian Church in Princeton.

The George H. Gallup International Institute

Ideas for Progress:
To discover, test and encourage application of new solutions to social problems.

"The progress of mankind depends in large measure upon new ideas, and the rate of this progress in turn depends largely upon the speed with which the ideas are disseminated."

George H. Gallup
1901 – 1984

The George H. Gallup International Institute was founded in 1988 in memory of a man who sought to develop public opinion research as a tool for building enlightened democracy.

George Gallup considered the world a laboratory in which nations are constantly testing new approaches to the problems of humanity. He dreamed of finding a way to identify constructive ideas as they emerge from this process, and to place them before the public so that support could be expressed for those that serve the common good.

The George H. Gallup International Institute seeks to advance this process through opinion research technology, to which George Gallup contributed greatly during his lifetime.

The George H. Gallup International Institute is a nonprofit, survey research organization whose mission is to discover, test, and encourage application of new approaches to social problems in education, environment, health, religion and human values.

The Institute seeks ideas with the potential to alleviate problems in these areas, through its own research and by outreach to other organizations and individuals.

When promising approaches are identified, the Institute places them before the public to determine their acceptability, using focus groups, case studies and surveys on a national or international scale.

Through this process, the Institute seeks to add a dimension to opinion research that permits citizens not only to express their views on possible solutions to social problems but also enables them to become a positive force for energizing and uplifting society.

Individuals and organizations with ideas for solving basic problems in religion and values, education, environment, and health are encouraged to contact George H. Gallup, Jr., Chairman, The George H. Gallup International Institute, 47 Hulfish Street, Princeton, NJ 08542.

PRRC Tidbits

On the occasion of PRRC's anniversary we would like to share with you the findings that over the years have awed us, bemused us, amused us, or just plain amazed us. They are not presented in any particular order, but are meant to be browsed. Save this issue, and dip into it again the next time you need survey insights for a sermon thesis or Sunday school topic to match with the appropriate scriptural text, or even to find a tantalizing, thought-provoking tidbit to fill up that blank space in the weekly or monthly bulletin.

America's favorite hymns are: (1) Amazing Grace; (2) How Great Thou Art; (3) Rock of Ages; (4) Battle Hymn of the Republic; and (5) The Old Rugged Cross.

Most survey respondents will endorse the notion of their children receiving some religious training, but a lower proportion say their children are actually receiving it.

One-third of the public say they have had a powerful religious insight or awakening that has changed the course of their lives.

Methodists and Catholics are most likely to have strayed from the fold: One in three Americans who was raised a Methodist and one in ten who was raised a Catholic no longer identifies with these churches.

Most Americans, young and old, hold to traditional social values and would welcome stronger family ties, greater respect for authority, more emphasis on working hard, and less on money.

Pharmacists and the clergy are rated highest for honesty and ethical standards (from a list of 25 occupations). The clergy always ranked first before the televangelist scandals.

Unchurched does not always mean unbelieving: 63 percent believe the Bible to be either the literal or inspired Word of God, and only 18 percent claim no religious affiliation.

Low-to-moderate income people are "more generous" than upper-income individuals in contributing volunteer time and money. Surveys consistently have shown that minority group members, most often in need, themselves, are among the most generous of all people.

Less than half of the college population has heard of the New Age movement. The great majority of these have an unfavorable opinion of it.

Most adults think people can be still be good Christians or Jews if they do not attend church or synagogue.

Religious involvement in this country, based on membership, church attendance, and the importance placed on religion, is highest in the Southwest.

Nearly all Americans, young and old, believe in God or a universal spirit. Accordingly, only about 4 percent of Americans can be described as "totally non-religious" — that is, are not church members, rarely or never attend church, say religion is "not very" or " not at all important" in their lives and have no religious preference. Most likely to fall into this category are men, younger persons, and Westerners.

A higher percentage of Americans (45 percent) say they rely more on themselves to solve the problems of life than on an outside power, such as God (36 percent). Seventeen percent say both.

Eight persons in ten in the U.S. believe in the separation of church and state.

But solid majorities of adults have consistently favored an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would allow prayer in the public schools.

Nearly half of Americans (47 percent) completely agree that even today miracles are performed by the power of God, an additional 35 percent mostly agree they are happening.

PRRC Tidbits

Fewer than half of Americans (44 percent) say they would vote for an atheist for President.

On the key question of which steps are most effective in dealing with depression or discouragement, prayer, meditation, reading the Bible, and exercise come out on top (from a list of 13 items).

Religion is seen by a large majority of Americans as strengthening family relationships either "a great deal" or "somewhat." Only about one person in four says "hardly at all" or "not at all."

Forty-four percent of Americans believe God has spoken to them. One person in eight believes that God speaks out loud today.

Evangelicals identify with the GOP and the Democratic party equally. For that matter, little difference between the adherents of the major political parties is found on most religious dimensions.

Spiritual growth is named more often than evangelism, supporting community causes, strengthening the local church, and influencing legislation, as the top priority for Christians.

By overwhelming margins, the American people favor having the public schools offer a variety of religious studies (all of which are permissible under the First Amendment: elective Bible study courses; use of the Bible in literature, history and social studies classes; comparative religion courses; and making school facilities available for use by student religious groups during non-school hours.

Evangelicals are most likely to be Protestants, women, blacks, older persons, and persons with less than a college education, living in the South.

On values relating to sex, morality, family life and religion, most Americans reject the extremes, and hold moderate opinions slightly to the right of center.

Religious conservatives are sometimes viewed negatively as overly strict on moral issues, close-minded and intolerant of other religious views; fanatical about their beliefs, as placing too harsh an emphasis on guilt, sin or judgement, too concerned about their own salvation, and too rigid and simplistic.

Liberals are sometimes viewed as substituting social concerns for the true Gospel, too compromising with the world, morally loose, having a shallow knowledge of the Bible, and too much influenced by secular humanism.

Seven in ten Americans believe in the devil, with half of this group saying the devil is a personal being and half believing the devil is an impersonal force. One person in five believes the devil does not exist.

Of eight professions tested to determine the public's perceptions of their status, physicians and the clergy emerge as the most prestigious. The public, however, approves of much higher pay for physicians than for the clergy.

Evangelicals and non-evangelicals hold sharply contrasting images of God. The former are far more likely than the latter to picture God as Father than as Mother, Master than Spouse, Judge than Lover, Creator than Healer, and Redeemer than Liberator.

Seven in ten Americans say their faith has changed significantly, with equal proportions saying it came about as a result of a lot of thought and discussion, and as a result of a strong emotional experience.

Eight in 10 Americans consider themselves to be Christians. According to the most stringent question we have devised to date, six in 10 completely agree that the only assurance of eternal life is personal faith in Jesus Christ.

Eighteen percent of adults are conservatives in terms of their religious ideology; 47 percent moderates; and 19 percent liberals.

The United States is unique in that it has one of the highest levels of formal education in the world, and at the same time, one of the highest levels of religious faith.

Local churches top a list of 24 organizations that the public believes are trying to improve city life.

Most Americans say the home is the most important place for the religious training of youth — far more than say church or school.

PRRC Tidbits

Homes where religion plays a central role produce persons whose future homes in all likelihood will be religiously oriented.

The strongest believers are those whose faith is based on personal experience — prayers that were answered or who experienced instances of God's intervention in their lives.

The "electronic church" reduces neither church attendance nor financial contributions.

Catholics and Protestants hold similar views on abortion.

Six adults in 10 say that at family meals at home someone says grace or gives thanks to God before meals. Half of teen households report that grace is said before the evening meal.

One person in seven reads the Bible daily.

In recent years at least three persons in 10 in the U.S. populace say they are "born-again" or evangelical Christians.

Most Americans believe the Ten Commandments are valid rules for living, but many have a tough time recalling just what those rules are.

Although 8 persons in 10 describe themselves as Christians, only about half of them can identify who delivered the Sermon on the Mount.

The most ardent "evangelizers" are Baptists, followed by Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodists, and Episcopalians and Catholics.

Most likely to watch religious TV programs are Protestants, older persons, non-whites,and people living in the South.

During a typical week one person in five takes part in religious activities other than church services.

Church attendance increases at Easter, but many worshippers do not know what is being celebrated.

The biggest gap between those who say they are members of a church and their rate of attendance at religious services is found among Episcopalians.

Three persons in four would like to see religious beliefs playing a greater role in people's lives.

Eight Americans in 10 wish there faith were stronger.

Four groups most open to renewed church involvement are: family oriented people who want their children to have a religious background and moral training; those who want to fulfill inner religious needs; those who seek fellowship; and those who have no yet been able to find a house of worship that meets their needs.

Four in 10 "opinion leaders" (representing the sciences, business and the arts, and other fields) believe in a personal God (that is, a God who observes one's actions and judges people), while one in three believe in "some sort of spirit of life force." Six percent fall into the category of agnostics and 14 probably are atheists.

More than four Americans in 10 believe in "creationism" — that is, that God created man in his present form within the last 10,000 years.

The percentage of Biblical literalists has declined sharply since 1963 when two-thirds of the public fell into this category.

One-third of church members feel that a homosexuals cannot be good Christians or Jews.

Two-thirds of Americans describe their chances of going to Heaven as "excellent" or "good."

People 65 and older are more likely than those younger to be members of a church or synagogue, to attend church in a typical week and to say religion is very important in their lives.

How do Americans most often nourish and strengthen their religious faith? Through prayer, helping others, attending religious services, and reading the Bible.

One person in six tithes to the church.

Advertisement

1992 Religion in America Report

The soon to be published **Religion in America 1992** report marks the 25th anniversary of the initiation of these regular and eagerly-awaited publications, which present facts and interpretations of the latest trends in religious beliefs and practices, as well as the public's changing views on the impact of religion on society.

Many of the indicators reported have become the basic standard measurements of organized religion in the United States.

This report will present a detailed analysis of church attendance and membership by key population groups, and by major faiths and denominations. A special commentary by George Gallup, Jr. will set forth the major challenges and growing opportunities facing churches in the immediate years ahead.

If you preach, write, or teach, we sincerely believe you will find this PRRC publication to be a constant aid in your mission.

Special pre-publication offer: Those who order **Religion in America 1992** now, will also receive a free copy of **100 Questions and Answers.** Written by George Gallup, Jr. and Sarah Jones, this book contains 100 of the most important questions we have surveyed in the area of religion.

This book, which represents the distillation of many recent Gallup surveys, deals in depth with each of 100 topics — analysis by key demographic groups, trends, background information and tables. Selections include religious belief and ethics, religion and politics, religious experience and spiritual development and commitment. This book will provide important historical trends to supplement the latest information contained in **Religion in America 1992.**

To receive **Religion in America 1992** and your complimentary copy of **100 Questions and Answers** send your check or money order for $30 to Princeton Religion Research Center, 47 Hulfish Street, P.O. Box 389, Princeton, NJ 08542.

EMERGING TRENDS is published monthly except July and August by the PRINCETON RELIGION RESEARCH CENTER. The Center, founded in 1977, is an inter-faith non-denominational organization with headquarters in Princeton, New Jersey. The PRRC specializes in creative actionable research, utilizing the world-wide attitudinal and behavioral facilities of Gallup International. The purpose of the PRRC is to gain better understanding of the nature and depth of religious commitment in the United States and abroad and to explore ways this information can enable religious leaders to promote spiritual growth. A one-year subscription can be obtained for $35.00. Inquire: Publications Department, P.O. Box 389, 47 Hulfish Street, Princeton, NJ 08542 (Telephone 609/921-8112). POSTMASTER: PLEASE NOTIFY US OF ADDRESS CHANGE.

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